

TAIPŪCAM IN MALAYSIA: AN ANALYSIS OF A HINDU FESTIVAL
(A STUDY OF BATU CAVES, SELANGOR)

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Dedicated To,

On the successful completion of this graduation exercise it is my pleasure to dedicate this project to the following: My beloved father who helped me to start this project but did not live long enough to see it complete.

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The priest at Batu Caves temple, religious leader and my respondents, whose without their co-operation this study would not have been possible at all.

Last but not least, my sincere gratitude to all those who have helped me in one way or another.

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TAIPUCAM IN MALAYSIA: AN ANALYSIS OF A HINDU FESTIVAL

(A STUDY OF BATU CAVES, SELANGOR)

SINOPSIS

Dalam konteks Malaysia perayaan Thaipusam (Taipūcam), merupakan perayaan yang paling popular di kalangan pelbagai perayaan Hindu. Satu kajian mengenai perayaan Taipūcam akan membantu menjelaskan kepercayaan agama di kalangan penganut Hindu di Malaysia.

Kajian ini mengandungi 6 bab.

Bab 1: mengandungi penerangan tentang pengenalan, tujuan dan skop kajian ini. Beberapa metodologi yang digunakan dan masalah-masalah yang dihadapi sewaktu kajian ini dilakukan juga disentuh.

Bab 2: diberi satu definisi ringkas mengenai Hinduism. Satu sejarah latarbelakang perkembangan agama Hindu di Malaysia juga diberi perhatian.

Bab 3: membincangkan tradisi Taipūcam yakni: apakah makna Taipucam, metos disebaliknya, tempat-tempat di dunia ini yang merayakan perayaan dan lokasi-lokasi penting

perayaan Taipūcam di Malaysia juga diberi. Bab ini juga menyentuh tujuan pengambilan kavāṭi dan pelbagai jenis kavāṭi.

Bab 4: menerangkan proses persediaan pengambilan kavāṭi dan upacara-upacara yang seseorang pengambil kavāṭi harus lalui untuk menunaikan 'niat'-nya.

Bab 5: memperlihatkan proses organisasi perayaan Taipūcam di Kuala Lumpur. Beberapa pemandangan yang menarik di Batu Caves juga akan diberi perhatian.

Bab 6: akan memberi satu analisa perubahan-perubahan yang berlaku di dalam perayaan Taipūcam sejak beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini. Adakah perubahan ini mempunyai kesan positif atau negatif pada doktrin Hindu yang sebenarnya. Ia juga akan menerangkan pengaruh politik dalam perayaan ini. Akhirnya beberapa cadangan untuk mengatasi beberapa kelemahan dalam pengamalan perayaan ini akan diberi. Ini adalah untuk memastikan ketulenan perayaan Taipūcam di tengah-tengah masyarakat Hindu yang pesat mengalami permodenan di Malaysia.

SYNOPSIS

In Malaysian context Taipūcam festival has become the major and most popular festival among the Hindu festivals. A study on Taipūcam festival will help to explain the religious belief of Hindus in Malaysia.

This study consists of 6 chapters.

Chapter 1: contains information on introduction, aims, and scope of this study. Various methods that were used and the problems that arise during the research are also touched in this chapter.

Chapter 2: a brief definition on Hinduism are given. A short history of Hinduism development in Malaysia are also emphasized.

Chapter 3: deals with discussion regarding the tradition of Taipūcam. The meaning of Taipūcam, the myth behind the festival, various places in the world that celebrates Taipūcam, and the main location of this festival in Malaysia are given. This chapter also deals with the aims of taking kavāṭi. The various form of kavāṭi are also highlighted.

Chapter 4: explain the preparation process and rituals a kavāṭi
- carrier undergoes to fulfill his or her vow.

1.1 Aims of research

Chapter 5: describe the organisation process of Taipūcam festival
in Kuala Lumpur. A few interesting sceneries that can
be seen at Batu Caves site will be highlighted.

Chapter 6: will give an analysis of changes that had occur in
Taipūcam festival in these recent years. Does the changes have
positive or negative consequences to Hindu doctrines. It will
also describe the politics involved in this festival. Finally
some suggestive remarks are given on how to overcome the
shortcoming of this festival. This is to ensure the purity of
Taipūcam festival in the midst of rapid developing Hindu society
in Malaysia.

CHAPTER I

1.1 Aims of research

It has been observed that Taipūcam festival has become a popular Hindu festival especially among the Tamil speaking Hindus in Malaysia. The increasing number of tourists beside Hindu pilgrims in these recent years, indicates that Taipūcam has received wide publicity. Statistics given by Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple stated that about 800,000 people attended the Taipucam festival at Batu Caves in 1987. This is rather an interesting phenomenon because in India Taipūcam is just a minor festival.

Although Taipūcam is a grand event, there are a very few books by Malaysian academicians that contribute sufficient information on this festival. This exercise is an attempt to fill in the gap left by the academicians. The author will analyse Taipūcam from a sociological perspective. She intends to account the historical development of this festival in Malaysia and plans to give reason why it has become very popular. The author also wishes to explain the rituals connected with the festival and the management involved in organizing such a grand event. In this case study, the author chose the Batu Caves site. She intends to link the function of

this festival to the Malaysian Tamil society in the religious, social, economic and political aspects.

Lastly, the author plans to examine the changes that have developed in this festival in recent years and hopes to consider the various problems related to Taipūcam.

1.2 Methods Used

This academic exercise is based on field work that was carried from February to August, 1987. The main methods used to conduct this study were participant-observation, key informant interviewing, informal interviewing, literature review and photograph documentation.

Questionnaire were not utilised for this purpose, instead informal interviews were carried out. The author attended a press conference on 8 February 1987 at 10 a.m. at Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple at Jalan Bandar Kuala Lumpur. The press conference was given by the officials of the temple who were the organizer of the festival at Batu Caves. Various souvenir programmes and pamphlets regarding Taipūcam were given to the author to help her understand the organizing process.

She conducted a three day observation at Batu Caves beginning on the Eve of the festival (11.2.1987), on the day of the festival (12.2.1987) and on the next day (13.2.1987) to witness the return procession of the silver chariot to Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple.

The author had the privilege to conduct an interview with Mr. Kodivel, the Chairman of Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple Devasthanam, the Secretary, Mr. Nadarajah, and other officials. She also interviewed the priest at the temple, Kurukkal Kalather Ramaiyer and the chief Pandaram at Batu Caves, Mr. Ratnam Pandaram. The interviews were conducted after morning religious ritual between 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

She interviewed Mr. Nagappan, the President of Hindu Sangam who is well versed in matters regarding Hindu festivals. A lot of critical and constructive opinion were given by him concerning the ways kavāṭis are carried. The author also interviewed a few pierces and kavāṭi carriers. She also used some of her own experience as a kavāṭi carrier.

To make this study more effective, the author interviewed 'key informants' who are elderly people to find out the historical aspects of Taipūcam. The author took photographs of various kavāṭis, and ritual preparations, etc.

1.3 Problems Faced During Research

The main problem that was faced by the author was getting negative responses from a few respondents, who were interviewed; especially from the officials of Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple regarding the financial aspects of Taipūcam festival. This information was considered confidential. Other difficulties were getting proper time to conduct interviews with officials and the priests. These respondents were usually busy on weekdays. Therefore an effort had to be made to meet them on weekends.

During her observation at Batu Caves, the author had difficulty in observing the rituals performed due to the large crowds.

Another problem which arose was the problem of language which led to hardship of getting information. Although the author is of an Indian origin, she was unable to write or speak fluent Tamil. The acuteness of this problem was especially faced while interviewing the priest, the pierces and other older informants. Furthermore, most of the literature that was obtained was in Tamil. However, this problems was sufficiently reduced by resorting to a friend who could read and write fluent Tamil and who also acted as an interpreter.

CHAPTER II

2.1 Definition of Hinduism

Hinduism is a religion of a diverse nature, therefore it is rather difficult to give a precise definition to it. The amorphous and complicated form of beliefs and practices that characterise Hinduism have led most scholars of Indian culture and civilization to define the religion in a number of ways.

To some Hinduism is a 'way of life'. Many Indologists believe that Hinduism is the religion expressed in the Hindu Sanskrit texts, namely, Vedas, Upanishads, and the most sophisticated philosophical works such as Advaita Vedanta of Sankara Carya. But others, especially the anthropologists and sociologists working on Indian culture, have opened the way to look at Hinduism from the perspectives of the non-scriptural folk tradition. Looking at the diverse nature of Hinduism N.N. Srinivas classified Hinduism as all Indian Hinduism peninsular Hinduism and local village Hinduism¹.

With these characteristics we could conclude that the term 'Hinduism' is attributed to a religious system encompassing the most variegated form of belief and practices.

¹. M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, p.21.

Among the Hindus in Malaysia, Hindu doctrines pervade all aspects of their lives.

2.2 Development of Hinduism in Malaysia

The Indian (together with Pakistanis and Ceylonese), who constitute the third largest ethnic group after the Malays (55.3%) and Chinese (33.8%) form 10.2% (1,171.1 thousand)² of the total population of West Malaysia. Of this, the Tamil makes up the vast majority of the total Indian population. The others are the Malayālis, Telugus, Punjabis, Gujeratis and Sindhis.

The present day Indians in Malaysia consist of two categories. The first is those that are believed to be the descendants of Indians who came as merchants about 2,000 B.C.. The second category is those that came at the beginning of twentieth century up to 1957. They come mostly as labourers. The overwhelming majority of these Indians are Hindus, with a small minority of Sikhs, Muslim and Christians.

One interesting fact to note is that most of these Indians, with few exceptions, came from the Southern part of

². Lapuran Am Banci Penduduk 1980, Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, p.17.

India, form the lands that have been traditionally occupied by the Dravidians³. Therefore, the southern custom and practices of Dravidian India dominated the Hindu customs and practices of the Indians in Malaysia. In accordance with this, the festivals that are celebrated in the Southern India are followed on a grand scale in Malaysia. One example of this is Taipūcam. Taipūcam is believed to have originated from a shrine on a hilltop of Palani in Tamil Nadu, South India. This festival is celebrated to honour Lord Murukan, a famous warrior god among the Southern Indians.

Taipūcam is celebrated in honour of Lord Murukan who vanquished the forces of evil. A person carries kavai to fulfill a vow to Murukan. The deity Murukan is looked upon both as a god of war in which form he is a destroyer of evil, and as a universal dispenser of favours to all who worship him with fervour.

³. Arasaratnam S., Indian Festival in Malaya, Maricon & Son Limited, 1966, p.1.

CHAPTER III

3.1 Tradition of Taipūcam

'Taipūcam' is a combination of the words 'Tai' which refers to the month Tai (January to February) in the Hindu calendar and 'Pūcam' which is referred to the star Pūcam.

Taipūcam festival occurs on a Purnami (full moon) day in the Tamil month of Tai when the moon passes in front of the star Pūcam. The month of 'Tai' is very auspicious month for the Hindus, especially in South India among the Tamil because it is the harvesting season. The presiding deity of the star Pūcam is the planet Brihaspati (Jupiter) which is considered the luckiest of planets⁴. Consequently, worship offered on this day would bring special merit to the worshipper.

Taipūcam is celebrated in honour of Lord Murukan who vanquished the forces of evil. A person carries kavāṭi to fulfill a vow to Murukan. The deity Murukan is looked upon both as a god of war in which form he is a destroyer of evil, and as a universal dispenser of favours to all who worship him with fervour.

⁴. Arasaratnam S., Indian Festivals in Malaya, Marican & Son Limited Malaysia, 1966, p.13.

to life and he fall to the feet of the youth who, it proved, was Murukan himself. Itāmpaṇ requested to stand ever at the god is portal and requested that whoever should offer vows to Murukan bearing a kavāṭi should be especially blessed. Both requests were granted. Thus it is believed Itāmpaṇ was the first to carry a kavāṭi.

The events describe in the myth explain the origins of the famous pilgrimage centre for devotees of Murukan at Palani, and also provide a pattern for specific mode of worship, employed in Taipūcam as it is celebrated among the Hindus. Two related ideas lies at crux of the myth. The first is the portrayal of Itāmpaṇ carrying a burden (Kavāṭi) and the second idea of Itāmpaṇ once he was subdued, as the exemplar of devotion to Lord Murukan. Therefore it is believed those who carry kavāṭi to the top of the hill and surrender themselves to Lord Murukan would receive the power to perform certain remarkable feats.

3.3 Various Places in the World That Celebrated This Festival

The historic temple dedicated to Lord Murukan where Taipūcam originated is the shrine on a hilltop in Palani, Tamil Nadu, South India. It is also celebrated in other Murukan

temples in Tamil Nadu. Beside India, South of Śrī Langka celebrates this festival especially in a village called Kataragama. In Singapore Taipūcam is celebrated on grand scale at the Thandāyuthabāni Temple on Tank Road, Singapore an establishment belonging to Nattukottai Chettier Community⁴. The Saiva Siddhanta Church in Hawaii, United State also celebrates Taipūcam yearly. Taipūcam is exceptionally popular among Hindus in Malaysia where it is celebrated lavishly at Subramanya Temple at Waterfall Road in Penang and at Murukan Shrine 'Śrī Subramanya Swami Kovil, Batu Caves situated about 12.8 kilometer from Kuala Lumpur.

Taipūcam was first celebrated in Batu Caves in 1888. Batu Caves was founder by the founded of 'Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple, Mr. Kayaroganam Pillai. He said that Mother (Śakti) come into his dream and requested him to build a shrine at Batu Caves for her son Lord Murukan at the top of the Batu Caves's hill. At first only a 'Vēl was placed in the shrine on top of the hill. In 1920 the statue of Lord Murukan was placed in the shrine.

An interesting fact to note is that Murukan is the deity of Chettiar Community. Therefore they contribute a large sum of money to finance Taipūcam.

⁴. Lawrence A Babb, Thaipusam in Singapore: Religious Individualism in Hierarchical Culture, Chopmen Enterprise, 1976, Singapore p.6.

3.4 Aims Of Taking Kavāṭi

Kavāṭis are carried usually as a fulfillment of a vow (Vendethalai) that a devotee has taken in the furtherance of some desired objectives in his life or as a recompense for the avoidance of some calamity. The recovering from some serious illness, or the realisation of a great desire, such as the birth of a child or job opportunities, would be the occasion for a person to carry kavāṭi for Lord Murukan on Taipūcam.

3.5 Various Form and Names Of Kavāṭi

Kavāṭi is usually made of either wooden or metal pieces. However there are other various names and forms of kavāṭi.

a) Pal Kavāṭi

Every individual that carries kavati in any shape whatsoever must have milk (Pal) in their kavāṭi. If there is no space in the kavāṭi to place the pots of milk then a person must lead the kavāṭi carrier by carrying a pot of milk. The milk that is used is cows milk. The cow is a sacred animal to Hindus. It is referred to 'Ma' (Mother) and symbolise fertility, purity and prosperity.

Pal kavāṭi is carried either in a form of an 'arch' which its two ends tied with small pots of milk and decorated with peacock feathers. It is suppose to resemble the original form of kavāṭi that Itampān carried on his shoulders. Otherwise Pal Kavāṭis are pots of milk that are carried on the head. This type are usually carried by female kavāṭi carriers,

b) Maccha Kavāṭi

This is not found in Malaysia but in India. It believed that a fisherman will catch a fish and put the dead fish in a pot filled with water. Then he will take the pot Murukan shrine in Palani Hill. When he reached the top of the hill it is said that the fish from the pot will jump out into a pond that is situated there and becomes alive.

c) Vēl Kavāṭi

Vēl is a form of a lance which looks like a spear. Vēl is the weapon of Lord Murukan which was given by his mother Goddess Śakti to kill a rakshasha (Asura) called Tārakasura.

The Vēl kavāṭi could be between 6 inches or 3 to 6 feet at

length. It is usually pierced through the mouth, cheeks, or tongue of the kavati carrier.

- d) Mayil Kavāṭi usually refers to Goddess Sakti or Mārīyaman. This kavāṭi are carried usually if the carrier is a woman. It is a kavāṭi made from peacock's feathers. It is considered very sacred as it is the vāhana or the carrier mount of Lord Murukan.

- e) Puspha Kavāṭi is made of sugar cane. It is carried by couples who have been granted child. The baby's hair is shaved. It is a kavāṭi made of flowers⁷. Usually flowers that are found at mountain are considered most suitable for Lord Murukan.

- f) Pannir Kavāṭi

This kavāṭi brings the offering of sweet smelling scented water such as rose or jasmine water. Usually this water is carried in pots either on the head or by hand.

7. Flowers that are particularly associated with Murukan are red and yellow in colour, such as the blossom of Kaṇṭal, Veṅkai, Katampu and Lotus.

g) Agni Kavāṭi

This are pots containing burning charcoals or wood that are placed under Veppillai leaves. This kavāṭi is carried by hand and it is usually refers to Goddess Śakti or Māriyamman. This kavāṭi are carried usually if the carrier or the member of his or her family had recovered from serious chicken pox disease.

h) Karumbu Kavāṭi

This kavāṭi is made of sugar cane. It is carried by couples who have been granted a child. The baby's hair is shaved. He or she is placed in a cloth tied to the middle portion of a bundle of long sugar cane. The husband will carry the front end of the sugar cane and the wife will carry the other end up the hill.

i) Sandhana Kavāṭi

Wet Sandalwood paste is moulded into the shape of a Gopu ram carried on the head. Some times limes are hooked to the sandalwood.

j) Kalasha Kavāṭi

This kavāṭi consists of a pot filled with milk and on top of the pot are decorated with flowers, leaves and sometimes limes until it is shaped into the form of Gopuram of a temple (triangle shape). It is carried on the head for Lord Gaṇeśha, the elder brother of Murukan.

k) Pavalla Kavāṭi

This kavāṭi are made of beads such as rudrāksha beads or pearls. Usually this beads are tied in string and hung on the neck.

Other kavāṭis include:

1) Shooting of Arrows

Here a devotee will mount a chariot and then shoot arrows that look like the Vēl. This is said to be a reenactment of the way Lord Murukan vanquished his enemy with his Sakti Vēl. However some respondent called it 'Rati Manmatan kavāṭi' which is referred to two Hindu Cupids.

2) Kavāṭi Personifying Hanumān

A devotee possessed by the spirit of Hanumān will walk, jump and behave like a monkey or 'Vanara'. Hanumān is a great disciple of Lord Rama.

3) Kavāṭi Personifying Munēswarar and Muniaṇḍi

This kavāṭi carrier wears a turban, smoke cheroots, carry either a long parang or a whip and whip his or her body. Sometimes skewers are hooked to their back and ropes are attached to this skewer. Then the ropes will be pulled by someone or sometimes tied to a small chariot and the kavāṭi carrier will drag it.

4) Madurai Viran

This kavāṭi bearer will walk on sharp parang.

5) Kāli and Daurgā

Kāli and Daurgā are the terrible personifications of Śakti. Those that are possessed by their spirits will cut his or her tongue and have skewers on his or her body.

Based on all these various form of kavāṭis it show that there is no specific or a standard form of kavāṭi. The form and shape of kavāṭi depends on what the devotees would like to offer to Murukan, when their wishes had been granted. The size and the form of the kavāṭi will indicate the value of a vow. Usually bigger kavāṭi are for important vows and small kavāṭis are for ordinary vows.



1. Mayil Kavati



2. Puspa Kavati

LARGE KAVĀTIS



3. Shooting of arrow



4. Muniandy



5. Madurai Viran

CHAPTER IV

4.1 Preparation a Kavāṭi Carrier Undertakes For Taipūcam Fasting (Viratam)

Basically the number of days of fasting depends on the extreme of the vows that are made. If a devotee makes a very serious vow then longer and more arduous fasting is required. Formerly, in India fasting last 48 days. Later, it reduced to either 21 or 14 or 7 days.

Ritual that are performed during fasting period

A kavāṭi carrier should wake up early before sunrise around 5 a.m.. He or she will take their bath by chanting Lord Murukan's name. After this he or she will clean the prayers site. Then a tray filled with fresh flowers and a cup containing milk and a few 'tulaci' (a kind of basil) leaves are placed in front of the Murukan image. The devotee will then light the prayers lamp (Villakku), burn incense (Dhupa) and camphor. Then he or she waves the burning camphor tray in front of the deity in a clockwise direction three times. Then he or she will fold their palms and pray.

Certain mantras that are recited, depending on the devotees knowledge. Among the learned people, they will chant

several Murukan stotras (verses) and sing from the Thirumurai or Pancapuranam. Then he or she will clasp hi or her hand and put their palms above the camphor flame in reverence and put it back to their eyes and face. Finally the devotee will apply 'tirunīru'[■] or vibhuti in the middle of the forehead and neck and drink the milk containing tulaci plant in it. This will indicate the end of morning pūjā and start of fasting.

After this they should not eat or drink anything until sunset. Penitents are to perform pūjā 3 times a day, at 5 a.m., 12 noon and in the evening. In the evening before the sun set around 5.30 p.m., the penitent will take a bath and start performing pūjā. Food and drinks, fresh flowers and fruits are placed in front of the deity. The penitent will ask for Lord Murukan's blessing and offer food to the god. Then he or she will light the prayer lamp, burn incense and camphor and perform ārati. Then the penitent will break his or her fast by drinking the milk with tulaci in it. Then they can partake the food. The foods are strictly vegetarian dish such as rice, milk, fruits and vegetables. Only a small amount of food will be eaten. It is preferred that the faster himself or herself prepare the food to guard against pollution. After partaking the food, the penitent will go to temple to pray and meditate. This is to help the penitent to always focus his or her mind

■. 'Tirunīru' is a holy ash made of cowdung.

and body to god. After going to temple some will take a rest while some will use this time to decorate their kavāṭi.

In some cases for bigger kavāṭi some experts will help to make the kavāṭi. The kavāṭi bearer must pay for every single item that is used to make and decorate the kavāṭi. Finally before sleeping the kavāṭi - carrier puts out the prayer lamp, put tiruṇṇiru on the forehead and neck, pray and close the prayer site. They usually sleep at the corner of the room on the floor with only a piece of yellow or white cloth as blanket. Some will use a piece a log as pillow.

For kavāṭi carriers who plan to have skewers they will be under a very strict discipline. Few days before Taipūcam festival their will go to a religious leader* to attend special pūjā. This is a type of 'trial kavāṭi' where they will be brought into trance. It is just to check that the fasting period is followed properly by the kavāṭi carrier. If he or she could get arul (god's blessing) and go into trance their this indicates a proper kavāṭi carrying procedure on Taipūcam day.

During this fasting period they are allowed to resume black clothing.

*. Religious leaders are usually experienced kavāṭi carrier or mediums who are experts in piercing.

their daily duties. However there are certain restriction.

They are:

- a) Should not lie, steal, cheat or use foul language.
- b) Quarrel or abuse anyone and animals.
- c) Smoke or drink liquor.
- d) Those who are married should not have any sexual relationship.
- e) Should avoid non-vegetarian food and should not use the plates and cup of other people. This is to avoid others saliva.

All this rituals will be followed until Taipūcam day.

4.2 Ritual That Are Performed On The Day Of Kavāṭi-Carrying

Kavāṭis can be carried either on the eve of Taipūcam or on the day of Taipūcam festival. The kavāṭi carrier will go to the Batu Caves river bank. There are two type of kavāṭi carrier: those who comes as individuals and those who come in organised groups. Kavāṭi carriers are usually dressed in yellow or white attire. However, nowadays, some use red and black clothing.

First they will dip into the river 3 times or use water from the water tanks provided by the management of Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple to bath themselves. (According to Hindu practice, a purification bath must precede ceremonial activities). Flowers, tumeric and lime pieces are put into the water. Then dripping wet they will go to their kavāṭis. There the religious leader will set up the kavāṭis in an altar like arrangement on the ground. Banana leaves plates are spread in front of the kavāṭis and fruits, lime, coconut, betel leaves and nuts, incense and camphor are put on top of it.

Then the religious leader (swami) will gather dry woods and put pieces of camphor in between them. The camphor will be lit and from the fire, a dense cloud of fragrant smoke will rise. Then empty pots are inverted over the smoke in such a way that the interiors are thoroughly fumigated and later the pots are turned and milk is poured quickly into it and closed with a piece of thin cloth over the rim. The pots of milk are tied to the kavāṭis.

Finally, pūjā will be performed where incense is burned, lime is cut and the religious leader will lit camphor on a tray and wave 3 times at the kavāṭi. Later he will show the flame to the kavāṭi bearers to place their palm on top of it and pray. Usually all kavāṭi carriers should go into trance. However, nowadays, those who carry ordinary kavāṭis do

not do so. But for those who are taking large kavāṭis they, must go to into trance.

This is done by closing their eyes and try to focus their mind to god. Religious leader will smear their body with tirunīru and holy songs and chants such as 'Vēl-vēl', vetri Vēl which means 'Victory to the lance of Murukan' and 'Aroogara' (Praise the lord) are said to the penitents ears. Informants say generally at this period they will start shivering, a sudden chill will be felt at the feet and slowly the chill will move to the body. Then the religious leader while singing will take tiruniru on his thumb and put it to the middle forehead¹⁰ of the penitent. Here the penitent will be unconscious. The religious leader will then pierce skewers to the body of the kavati carrier.

Informants stated, due to the cold water and the fasting period the skin naturally becomes soft. Therefore it is easy to pull the skin and pierce. The religious leader will pull the skin and hook the skewers to it and the skewers are tied to ropes that are attached to the kavāṭi. If during this time the kavati carrier shouts in pain or blood comes out from his body, then the piece will immediately stop. This will indicate that the kavāṭi carrier did not complete his or her fasting rituals

¹⁰. Middle of forehead is called 'Netrikan' where the third eye is believed to be located.

properly. Therefore he or she did not get god's blessing and couldn't go into trance fully. So, it is sinful and harmful for the penitent to continue the task.

If everything goes well then the kavāṭi carrier will feel nothing until all the skewers are hooked and the kavāṭi are mounted. Finally the piercer will pat the kavāṭi - carriers cheek and he or she will be semi-conscious but do not feel any pain. The penitent is ready to walk or dance towards the step and climb to the top of the hill. As the kavāṭi carrier reaches the first step of the stairs, he or she will touch it to beg the god to give strength to climb the 272 steps safely. As he or she reaches the top at the entrance the kavāṭi carrier will bow to Itampan image at the left side of the entrance. The kavāṭi carrier will continue his or her journey until they reaches the Murukan shrine in the cave. At this point the kavāṭi - carrier will dance vigorously. It is believed that the milk in the kavāṭi will rise and flow out of the pots.

After that the kavāṭi - carrier is led to surround the huge camphor altar and this will mark the end of kavāṭi carrying. The religious leader who followed the penitent will again touch the forehead and he or she will be unconscious. Then the Vēl and skewers are taken out and the kavāṭi dismounted. Later the religious leader will pat the kavāṭi carriers cheek and bring the kavāṭi carrier back to

consciousness. The milk from his pot are distributed to him and other people to drink and the kavāṭi carrier are asked to sit and rest. Later the kavāṭi carrier will go home, bath, and sleep.

Ritual After Taipūcam Festival

Kavāṭi carriers duty does not end until the third day after Taipūcam. There is a special pūjā performed called 'The Iṭampan Pūjā' where an offering are given in honour of Iṭampan. The offerings are a cooked chicken, fruits, cheroot, liquor, rice, eggs sweets etc. The penitent will usually invite the religious leader on this day to join the pūjā. The food is laid on a banana leaf and left at the corner of the house. It is believed that Iṭampan's spirit will taste the food. Then the kavāṭi - carrier is allowed to eat the offering. The leftovers are bundled up and together with the decoration that are taken from the kavāṭi are thrown in the river the next day. The kavāṭi carrier at this day will give a feast to all that help during Taipūcam and present gifts such as money, cloths, fruits and sweets to the religious leader as a token of gratitude.



6. A religious leader performing pūjā



7. Skewers are hooked to the body

CHAPTER V

5.1 The Process of Taipūcam

The activities associated with Taipūcam in Kuala Lumpur last for three days. The organisers are the Śrī Mahā Māriayamman Devasthanam, Jalan Bandar, Kuala Lumpur. The main event of the first day is the 'Silver Chariot' procession in which lord Murukan makes a journey from the temple to Batu Caves. It is said that Murukan will leave his mother's house (Māriayaman is another personification of Śakti) to his home at the mountains.

Activities begin in the early morning. A special pūjā called 'Viseksha pūjā' is performed at 5.30 a.m. Special Abhiṣekam or Thirumanjanam (the bathing of the god) is done. In this special Abhiṣekam, Lord Murukan is bathed with water, milk, tender coconut water, ghee, honey, sugar cane juice, tirunīru, sandhana (sandal wood paste) rose water and pañcamirtam¹¹.

While the abhiṣekam is done 108 verse of mantras are

¹¹. Pañcamirtam is a sweet dish made of five fruits such as the mango, jack fruit, banana, grapes and orange plus brown sugar water.

recited by the priest¹². In Mariyamman Temple mantras are recited in Tamil and the source of mantras are 'Subramanya Panjangangam'. Abhiṣekam can be watched. Later the god is closed by a curtain. At this period the Lord is decorated and adorned with embroidered silk, gold and diamond jeweleries and garlands. This is called Alankaram. Finally when the Kurukkal is ready, the curtain is opened and Alankaram Deepam is waved to the god. Flames are waved because it is believed that they are visible to the three world and facilitate access to the inner world. The deepam is shown thrice in the shape of Aum.

The Kurukkal will take a few silver instruments and waved it to the god the same manner. The items are Kumba Deepam, Kudai (umbrella), Visiri (fan), Alavadham (leaf), Venjamaram (a form of fan also), Kodi (flag) and Kannadi (Mirror). As he waved he recite the mantras. When he has finished waving he throws a type of grass called argan and flowers until the 108 verses are completed.

Finally the mantras stop and he indicates to a man standing in front to sing devotional songs. The man will sing a few songs from Tirumurai. As he finishes, the Kurukkal light

¹². Usually the priest associated with Murukan is a pandaram but due to insufficient pandaram, It is done by Kurukkal which is a Brahman at the temple. However^{at} Batu Caves the main puja is done by pandaram, helped by Kurukkal and a few volunteers helpers which the pandaram brings from the Hindu Darma Mandaram School from Ulu Selangor plus his own pandarams.

the Alankara Deepam again and does arati for the last time. The flames are offered to the crowd in the temple. After this Lord Murukan's idol, his two consorts Valli and Tevayānai plus his Vēl are carried from his shrine and are carried around the temple 3 times clockwise direction.

After this the idols are mounted to the silver chariot on a Mayil platform and arati is done. Water is sprinkled and a coconut is broken. Finally the chariot leaves the temple pull by two white bulls. The chariot takes the route from Jalan Bandar, Jalan Sultan, Jalan Rodgers, Jalan Belanda, Jalan Raja Laut, Jalan Ipoh, Jalan Tun Ismail to Sri Thandayuthabani Temple in Jalan Ipoh where the pandaram performs pūjā. Then the chariot follows the route of Jalan Perhentian, Jalan Ipoh until it reaches Batu Caves at about 10 a.m. The lord and his consorts are seated on a special platform in the New Swami Mandapan at the ground of Batu Caves. Pūjā and archana are done by the Māriayamman Kurukkal and later the Golden Vēl is given to the Batu Caves Subramany Temple Pandaram and he will carry the Vēl to the top of the hill and place it in Murukan Shrine in the caves. In the evening around 4 p.m., the chairman of Sri Mahā Māriayaman Temple, Mr. Kodivel will raise the ceremonial flag and declare the festival officially.

5.2 Events On The Eve Of Taipūcam

Crowds will start increasing. Actually some devotees have come the day before. These are mostly people from estates where they are given 3 days holidays for Taipūcam by their plantation management. They come in chartered buses and cars from all over West Malaysia especially Selangor, Melaka, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, Johor and Perak. They stay in hostels and tents provided by the management.

At the ground of the caves there are rows and rows of stalls selling variety of things and food. Most of the stalls are at the left side of the entrance to the stairs. The items that are sold are Indian sweet such as Jelebi, Halwa, Ladoo, dry rice (Aval), parupu, candies and drinks. Aside from foods, there are other items that are sold, such as Jeweleries, apparels, silver and bronze culteries, cosmetics, paintings, flowers, souvenirs, books, furnitures, tapes (devotional and modern songs) and items such as tiruniru, sandal wood paste, incense, kumkum etc.

There were a few stalls that are put up by various Hindu organisation in Malaysia such as the Satya Sai Baba Centre, Hindu Sangam, Arya Samaj, Rudra Devi Samaj and 'Krishna Consciousness Movement'. These stalls display their organisation activities.

At the far end of these stalls, there is a place where Indian cultural programmes are set up by the organising committee. A mini fun fair is also set up. There are also a Medical camp where there are volunteers doctors and nurses giving free medical services such as blood test, high blood pressure test, diabetics, plus a blood donation unit that pleas for blood donation. These doctors are helpers from St. John Ambulance of Malaysia, The Red Cross^{esent} of Malaysia, Volunteers from Sivananda Clinic, Satya Sai Baha Centre and those that are appointed by the temple management.

At the Sri Ramachandran Nilayam a few religious leaders give speeches. Beside the grand stand there is a big long stall set up by M.I.C. to sell MIED or Projek Loteri Pelajaran tickets to the crowd. The information centre which is situated opposite the ground stand gives informations regarding the festival. At the left side of the stairs there is a small temple called the Naga and Puliya shrine where a lot of devotees are breaking coconuts and performing archana^{is}¹³. From the above descriptions one can conclude that Batu Caves during Taipucam festival is not only the site for religious purpose but also serves as a place to make business, to get a lot of

¹³. Arcanai are made at 5 shrines i.e. the New Swami Mandapam, Naga and Puliya shrine, and the rest are at the top of the hill the Raman shrine, Murukan shrine and Puliya shrine.

profit, to get services, to get entertainment, plus a, placed used by politician to project their activities.

The activities and rituals in Batu Caves continue throughout the night.

5.3 Events On Taipūcam Day

Kavāṭis and devotees start increasing at 5 a.m. A huge crowd gathers at the Batu Caves River where the kavāṭi will begin. This year not many people had their ritual bath in the river as it is very dirty and polluted. The temple management provided tanks of water for the devotees to take their bath. Various holy songs of Lord Murukan could be heard in the air.

Other main activities are:

- a) There are devotees who are taking bath.
- b) There are devotees who are praying as several religious leaders lit camphor and wave it to the kavāṭi and the gods.
- c) There are devotees that are going into trance. They are surrounded by people singing devotional songs. An

interesting point to note is some of the devotional songs have the rhythm of Tamil movie's songs though the lyrics concern Lord Murukan.

d) There are devotees who have been pierced and the kavāṭi mounted on to them.

e) There are also kavāṭis that are moving towards the hill of Batu Caves. There are kavatis taken individually and taken in a group.

At 8 a.m. the idol Lord Murukan is carried from the New Swami Mandapam to the river. There abhiṣekam is done and the lord gave 'darshan' to the devotees, and then they are carried back to the Mandapam. By 10 a.m. kavāṭis are increasing in numbers and sizes and some are really exotic. There are many innovation to the kavāṭis where the Vēls are very long (about 6 feet) Mayil kavāṭi are bigger and are shaped to look like a ladder. Most of the kavāṭi carriers carry Vēl and have skewer hooked to their bodies. There seems to be a lot of kavāṭis personifying demigods and village deities such as Madurai Viran, Munēswarar, Muniandi, Kāli, Durgā, etc., where the kavāṭi carriers are dressed in finery such as silk and colorful turbans. This is maybe to indicate that village deities also have the same status and prestige as the Vedic (Brahman) gods. These kavāṭi carrier is mostly are form the lower strata of the

society, (labourer from Indian settlements and estate workers). Therefore this could also be a way for them to fight for equal rights from the upper class.

There is an interesting kavāṭi which informant stated are the first time been taken this year. That is a chariot which is being pulled by a few people and a woman and a man mounts on it and shoots arrow into the crowd. At the steps leading to the hill top there are three sections. The left end are for devotees going up, the middle one are reserved for kavāṭi carriers and the third one are for devotees who have prayed and coming down. At the stairs there are few men and children selling archanai packets for a \$1.00 each. At the top of the staircase there is a open space leading to the Murukan shrine. A few doctors, nurses and St John ambulance members are busy attending devotees that had some mishap due to the terrible heat outside the caves. The atmosphere is very stuffy and noisy and the crowd is so intense that one could barely breathe.

Beside the Medical centre there is a shed that has cocks and even goats inside. The attendance of the shed informed that these animals are given by devotees as sacrifice. The animals will be either slaughtered or let to roam in the Batu Caves ground. At the Murukan shrine, about 5 Pandarams are busy performing pūjā. Devotees that wishes to do archanai must buy

a archanai ticket at the entrance of the shrine and together with the archanai packets, they hand it over to the pandaram. The archanai packet contains a whole coconut, 5 bananas, 2 battle leaves, (vethalai), beetle nuts (pake) and a packet of camphor. The pandaram will break the coconut, do archanai and give back half a coconut, 2 bananas, 2 beetle leaves and beetle nuts, flowers, tiruniru and few camphor pieces are lit into the coconut and returned to the devotees.

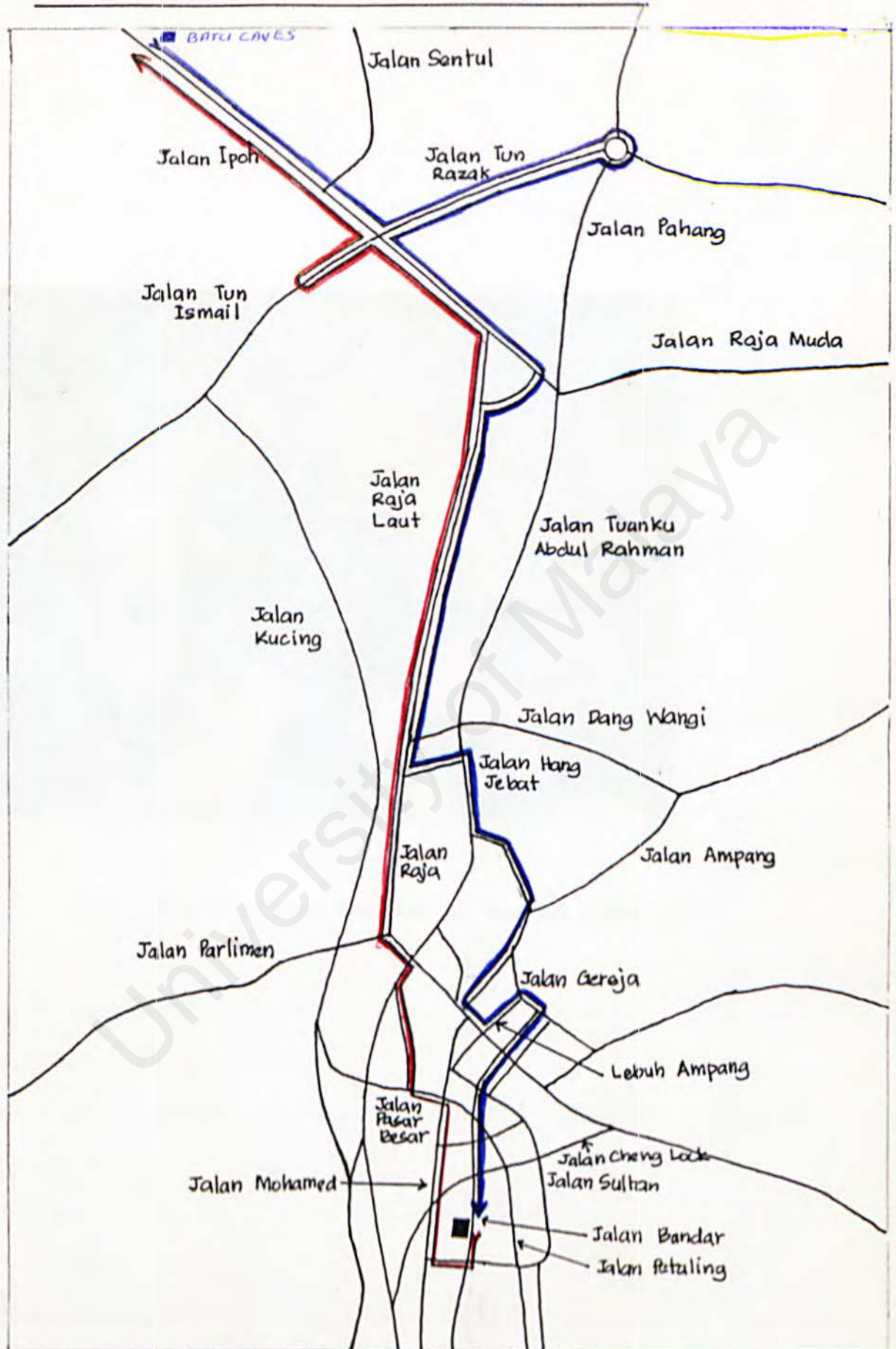
In front of the shrine there is a huge camphor burning site and the fire is lit up high in a fiery blazing heat. At this point every kavāṭi carrier seems to be moving very vigorously as they are led to circle the camphor burning site. After this their kavāṭi processions is over and they will mount down their kavāṭi and rest. At the right side of the caves where devotees are turning to go up from the dungeon there a group of beggars seated along the way begging for money. A lot of devotees put one cent coin to the beggar cup as it is a form of giving alms. One of the beggar informed me that the money will later be exchanged with a broker who takes the money and changes it at bank. These events will go on until 4.30 p.m. and slowly the festival will come to end.

5.4 Events on the third day

Main event of the third day is the chariot procession back to Māriyamman Temple. At 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. the Vēl from the hill will be brought down and placed back to Lord Murukan's idol that are in the New Swami Mandapan. The lord and his consorts will be mounted to the silver chariot again and will leave Batu Caves and followed the route of Jalan Ipoh and finally stops at 2½ miles Sentul Artisan Quarters field at about 10 a.m. At about 4.30 p.m., puja will start and archanaais are done. At 6.30 p.m. the idol will be mounted back to the chariot and will start its procession very slowly. It will stop at few areas where there are Hindu residence so that devotees from that area could come and pray and have the god's darshan.

The chariot will proceed back through Jalan Tun Razak, Jalan Raja Laut, Jalan Hang Jebat, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Yunus, Jalan Munshi Abdullah, Jalan Ampang, Jalan Melaka, Jalan Tun Perak, Leboh Ampang, Jalan Bandar, and finally reached Māriyamman Temple at about 4 a.m.

THAIPUSAM. - BATU CAVES - CHARIOT PROCESSION.



- Sri Maha Mariamman Temple
- Chariot Procession From Temple to Batu Caves
- Return Journey from Batu Caves



8. The Murukan Shrine on top of the hill.

5.5 Auction

During Taipūcam the Temple Devasthanam will receive a lot of item given by the devotee as a form of giving offering or sacrifice to lord Murukan. This is a way of thanking the god for fulfilling their vows.

All this item will be auctioned by the Organizing Committee and the sales will go into the Māriayamman Temple Treasury.

This the auction was done on 27.2.1987 at the Māriayaman Temple.

It is done just like any other auction, where the items will be displayed and the highest bidder will get the item and a receipt.

The items are:

- i) Saries and dhotis donated for the god and goddess.
- ii) Statues.
- iii) A lot of silver and bronze culteries.
- iv) Paintings.

CHAPTER VI

6.1 Conclusion

In the earlier years Taipūcam was more a religious festival where Hindu pilgrims gathered to pray and to fulfill their vows. It also gave them a chance to display their cultural heritage. But in these past few years Taipūcam festival in Malaysia has undergone tremendous change. For example the function of Batu Caves shrine during Taipūcam has changed from a mere religious site into a tourist attraction and commercial site. It has become a place for earning fast money. Taipūcam seems to provide an opportunity for exhibition and entertainment.

This change has raised many questions among various people. It is now debated whether this change is a positive one or a decline of the true meaning and rituals of Taipūcam festival. Overall many Indians have expressed dissatisfaction with the political influence in Taipūcam and with the conduct of penitents at Taipūcam especially the issue regarding kavāṭi bearing.

Religious festivals should not be mixed with politics. However the author discovered that Taipūcam festival are very much influenced by politic especially by Malaysian Indian

Congress ((M.I.C.)). It has become a must that MIC officials should officiate the Taipūcam festival in Batu Caves. Therefore they use the festival as a platform to express their views and to gain support from the Indian community.

For example this year they used Batu Caves as an arena for selling the MIED (Malaysian Indian Education Development) ticket where about \$15,000 was collected. MIC banners were hang everywhere and they had control over the information centre. MIC leaders also claimed that it is they and not the DAP that was responsible in achieving public holiday declaration for Taipūcam in Negeri Sembilan this year.

This clearly indicate that the festival are used for political and personal interest, and the MIC leaders have influence in the management of Śrī Mahā Māriyamman Temple.

In reference to kavāṭi bearing, for many years Hindu groups such as the Malaysian Hindu Youth Council, Malaysian Hindu Sangam, religious leader and individuals have been expressing the need to systemise and regularise kavāṭi bearing. They express fulfilling of vows should be done with devotion and discipline. Nowadays, from the ordinary arch type kavāṭis, the kavāṭis are becoming larger and more flamboyant. The common spectacle at Taipūcam include gruesome sights of 'devotees' walking on swords, whipping themselves with chains,



MIC Chairman giving Speech



MIC Politicians Selling MIED tickets

prancing about like monkeys, piercing the body and cheeks with abnormally large spikes and hooks, and dancing to the tempo of pop music, from improvised metal drums called 'bongo'.

Another interesting fact is regarding the increasing number of women bearing large kavāṭis. These kavāṭi carriers claimed that they are spiritually religious, therefore they are able to undertake such arduous task. In the case of the women, why do they bear large kavatis? Is it because they made important vows? Or is it a way for women to express equal rights and prove that they are capable of taking large kavāṭis. It seems also Taipūcam festival has been used by people, especially the youth to test their strength and to exhibit their energies. The spiritual motive of the festival seems to be neglected.

The author discovered that there is no proper channel or authority to systemise and control kavāṭi bearing. The organisers stated that they do not have the authority to control kavāṭi bearers. This is because, kavāṭi bearers comes from various states of West Malaysia and other foreign countries, and are free to perform the vows. Even though they do have certain rules and restrictions regarding large kavāṭi, it is impossible to ensure it is followed due to the massive crowd during Taipūcam festival.

One could, conclude that these abusive actions are done, mainly out of ignorance. This because most of the extreme kavāṭi bearers are youths from the lower strata of the society especially from the rural areas such as estates, where the education level is low. Furthermore this kavāṭi - carriers that were interviewed were mostly ignorant of the myth regarding Taipūcam. To them the ^{large kavotis} exhibit their valour and vitality. Their Kavāṭis are mostly personification of village deities where they try to indicate that village deities have the same status as the Vedic Gods.

Considering this situation, it would be necessary to make an effort to educate the Hindus, on the proper ways of fulfilling vows and to organise proper kavāṭi bearing.

The task may be colossal, but it is not impossible. The Hindu community and temple authorities of Singapore have proved that such undesirable practices can be eliminated through education, guidance administration and enforcement.

Therefore various Hindu organisation concerned in Malaysia should follow the Singapore example. Datuk Samy Velu himself in his speech at Batu Caves has urged the Malaysian Hindu organisation to educate Hindu on proper religious knowledge and practices.

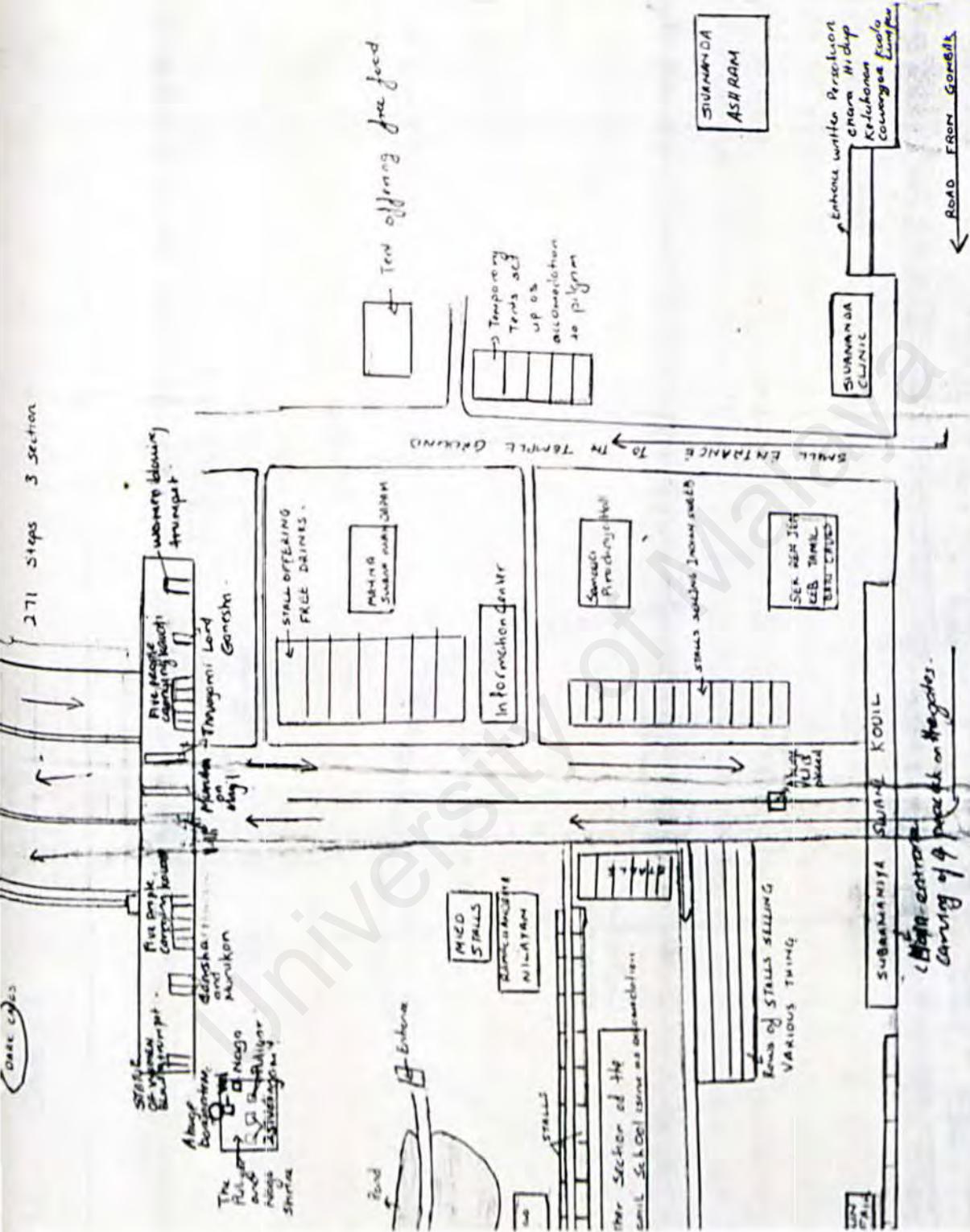
Finally the success of such a campaign^{sign} will depend on the active support and co-operation of all the different parties concerned. For example the support of Sri Maha Mariyamman Devasthanam which is responsible for the administration of Batu Caves temple, Malaysia Hindu Sangam and Malaysia Hindu Youth Council who command a great deal of influence are respect at the grass root level are much needed. Indian politician should take the initiative to support the reform campaign in their speeches instead of using Taipūcam festival for the political interest.

However, the main success of this campaign lies in the hand of the members of the public especially the devotees. Unless they are willing to respond positively toward this reform effort, there will be no success in this campaign.

Co-operation from all parties could ensure the purity and divinity of Taipūcam festival in Malaysia.

DATE 2/2/23

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SCENERY OF BATU CAVES GROUND
ON TALPUCAN DAY

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